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(632) 552-9907

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STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE #12 (SO12)

(Conflict Reduced in Mindanao and Other Areas Vulnerable to Violence)

USAID joins LGUs, groups providing Basilan with infrastructure facilities

LAMITAN, Basilan – Senior US government officials visited this province yesterday to turn over to local organizations the latest investment program intended to support efforts at economic development and peace in Central and Western Mindanao.

In this town, the location of intense fighting between the military and the Abu Sayyaf terrorist group in 2001, an expanded berthing facility and a new ro-ro (roll-on, roll-off) ramp will provide a gateway for local producers to ship their goods to the Mindanao mainland and also offer improved passenger services for the residents and those residing in neighboring areas.

The improved Lamitan port features a new ro-ro ramp, mooring facilities, and breasting dolphins. This economic infrastructure project is one of some 40 mid-scale infrastructure projects that will be undertaken by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), through the partnership between its Growth with Equity in Mindanao (GEM) program and the local governments.

At the inauguration ceremony, United States Charge d'Affaires Am-

bassador Darryl Johnson underscored the importance of economic infrastructure in generating economic growth and expanding economic opportunity to sustain peace in the region.

“We know that ultimate responsibility for economic progress in this region rests with local leaders and the people themselves. We are truly pleased to be able to help those who are committed to peace in Mindanao, and who have the vision to see a brighter tomorrow,” CDA Amb. Johnson said.

The inauguration ceremony was also attended by USAID's Mission Director Jon Linborg; Robert Wuertz, chief of USAID's Office of Economic Development and Governance; Basilan Gov. Wahab Akbar; Lamitan Mayor Roderick Furigay; and other community leaders.

Johnson and USAID Mission Director Linborg also participated in the turn-over of computers connected to the Internet at the Basilan State College Laboratory High School (BSCLHS), located a few kilometers from the Lamitan port.

The 500 students of BSCLHS are among the 227,000 students in 212 schools across Mindanao now connected to the World Wide Web by GEM's

Computer Literacy and Internet Connection (CLIC) Program.

CLIC has worked closely with the parent-teacher-community associations (PTCAs), community groups, and business organizations such as Intel Corporation, Microsoft Corp., Innove Communication Inc., STI-Education Services Group, IBM and Cisco to make the initial investment and the cost of sustained operations affordable to even the poorest communities in Mindanao.

The PTCAs participating in the CLIC program have pledged to cover the annual fees for future Internet subscription and they take joint responsibility, with the respective school administration, for the maintenance of computer units. Over 400 schools are expected to be connected by September 2006.

Last year, the school's PTCA partnered with GEM's Education Awareness Support Effort's Matching Grants program to purchase computers and a printer for its computer laboratory. EASE Matching Grants match the expenditures of the PTCAs on projects focused on facilities and services that enhance academic performance.

(Source: Manila Bulletin, 8/24/05, page H1)